I: Turnbull E-4. 5 (1951-1955) 1965 FO4 Pygmies FO4
Mbuti

[VET HUNTERS]

1. A Pygmy who had been visiting another band returned to his own camp and reported that a cousin of his had died. A wailing, suddenly started, was taken up, mostly by women but also by men and children, all over the camp. It lasted for 10 minutes and was repeated several times during the evening for five minutes at a time. Everyone went to sleep as usual; there was a final wail on waking the next morning. 763

2. A newborn infant (son of one of the most important hunters in the band) died at night. Only its father and mother wailed. Early in the morning the parents dug a pit in the house and buried the baby, wrapped in a small mat, with no ceremony. The next morning the couple dismantled the house and, using the same material, rebuilt it on the other side of the clearing. That night the father danced as usual. 763 764

3. An old Mbuti woman died while visiting the village. She was the mother of three of the male members of the band. Most of her relatives were with her when she died, and they wailed. When the news was received back in the hunting camp, such of her relatives as remained there wailed. Only one of them, one of the great hunters of the band, left to attend the burial. 763

4. There was an epidemic in a hunting camp, [P 222-D] 763 731 165

1: Turnbull E-4. 5 (1951-1955) 1965 FO4 Pygmies FO4
Mbuti

[p.223-A]

763 and two people died. After burial and wailing,
• 731 camp was broken. On the march to another site a
165 woman who had not contracted the illness died, although she was not "ready to die." Within two weeks a woman gored by a buffalo (an extremely rare occurrence) died from her wounds. Following this last event, there was a consultation, and it was suggested that the band should disperse as there was some strong influence at work.[1] However, the dispersal did not take place.

763 5. A very well-liked hunter died while in the
[754] village. There was some talk that a half-paralyzed Pygmy, also a member of the band, had put a curse on him; but this in no way impaired the friendship between the accused and the children of the deceased. When the Pygmy was dying, his son wanted to take him back to the forest but was persuaded to let him die in the village in peace. His family and friends were present; those in the hut wailed occasionally, those outside were busy cooking. When he died the wailing broke out anew, and relatives started coming into the village from the forest. His villager patron could not come, so he sent his brother, the headman of a village a few

1: Turnbull E-4. 5 (1951-1955) 1965 FO4 Pygmies FO4
Mbuti

[NET HUNTERS]

[P. 237-C]

the basic necessities of life. No seasonal change involves them in any significant change of activity (except possibly the honey season, when game hunting may be abandoned). The economy of the Mbuti further militates against elaborate ritual by preventing the easy manufacture of ritual trappings and by not allowing for any substantial form of sacrifice. Nor is it possible to provide time and men for ritual specialization. This much applies throughout the Ituri. However, the net hunters, by their hunting techniques, are assured of a larger and steadier supply of game than the archers. Nevertheless, crises occur. The Mbuti, for instance, are frequently beset with the tempestuous rainstorms that sweep the forest in the afternoons and, more rarely, during the night or early morning. Putnam (1948, 338) points out that these storms not only cause physical discomfort in the hunting camp, where huts may become flooded and the clearing so swamped in mud that the whole camp must be moved, but they also prevent hunting and bring death through lightning or through causing dead branches to fall on people. Putnam writes: "No other element in their life causes so much disturbance or upsets them so profoundly" (1948, 338).

788
182
[224]
[184]
731
132

1: Turnbull E-4. 5 (1951-1955) 1965 FO4 Pygmies FO4
Mbuti

[NET HUNTERS]

338). The Mbuti associate the storms with water, rain, thunder, lightning, rainbows, and snakes, and possibly fire. The net hunters have a particular fear of water and, as do the local villagers, seem to believe in water spirits, or, as they call them, "water animals." These are most frequently associated with death. A water animal is connected with the rainbow, perhaps the most dreaded of all natural phenomena.

As might be expected therefore, such ritual as exists is most often connected with the storm and its symbols. Putnam, who knew of Schebesta's account of ritual among the archers, did not disagree with it in so far as cult practices were described among the net hunters. However, cult practices are far less common, and he mentions no spirit huts or shrines such as were described by Schebesta (1950, 77). Food offerings may be thrown into the undergrowth, though specific information is lacking. I have met net hunters who stoutly deny that they would waste food in this way; certainly I never saw any offerings being made. But Putnam disagrees strongly that prayer or invocation is involved. The net hunters, he says (in unpublished works), do not invoke the storm god or

[P. 237-D]

2: Tumbull E-5 (1951-1958) 1965 FO4 Pygmies FO4
Mbuti

hunter may initiate the action. Thus the *elima* and the *molimo*, which are crisis festivals, are initiated by the hunters, but it is the elders who control them and give them their spiritual quality. It is the elders who act not only as arbiters between the members of the band, but between the band and the forest, between this life and the next. Even in the most ordinary run of everyday life there is seldom a day that does not demand from one elder or another, man or woman, some opinion that will be couched in terms like "such and such is good for (or pleasing to) the forest," or "this makes my spirit (*roho*) feel good."

The greatest departures from daily life occur when the band visits the village, or when a villager visits the band. In either case it is as though the whole social structure of the Mbuti were suddenly changed. A single individual becomes, all at once, a chief. Age groups break up and nuclear families come to the fore. The only central fire will be that of the "chief." But as this is not part of the forest world, exceptions occur within the forest context only rarely. There is seldom any disaster such as the invasion of a camp by elephant, though it happens sometimes. Hunting is generally more than adequate throughout the year. But though hunger does sometimes come to the Mbuti, starvation is unknown. Sickness is not uncommon, but is rarely serious. Throughout the year daily life goes its usual way interrupted only by major, inevitable crises of the life cycle.

BIRTH

Birth is the first crisis of life, and among the Mbuti it is, as elsewhere, not without its attendant dangers. Though no statistics are available, it is the opinion of villagers and Mbuti, and of many Europeans, doctors and otherwise, who know both communities, that infant mortality is appreciably less among the Mbuti, and sterility less common. This may be due to the fact that their relative isolation has defended the Mbuti against the venereal diseases widespread among the villagers. Be that as it may, there is no doubt that the Mbuti evidently feel less need for concern at childbirth. This applies to both the nuclear family and to the band. There is absolutely no formal recognition on the part of the band, and only the barest of interest. Considering the fluid and nonlineal composition of the band this is not surprising, particularly since, for this type of band, birth is only one form of recruitment, and by no means the most sure or